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THE CHANGING ARMAMENTS OF EUROPE

BY SYDNEY BROOKS

“By reason of the events which are taking place in the Balkans the balance of European power has been shifted.” It was in these words that the German Government on March 28th officially opened its explanation of the enormous, the unparalleled increase in military strength and equipment for which it had resolved to secure the sanction of the Reichstag. The explanation has the rare merit of really explaining. The war in the Balkans has not only shifted the balance of European power, but has shifted it profoundly to Germany’s disadvantage. It has done so in four obvious and well-defined particulars. In the first place Turkey has been eliminated from the chess-board of European politics, possibly not as a problem, but certainly as an active military Power of any account. All the friendship and fostering protection which Germany has lavished on the Ottoman Empire are now proved to have been profitless. They brought in a certain commercial and political return for many years, but in the final reckoning they have turned out a bad investment; and all the hopes of military assistance and co-operation that went hand in hand with them have likewise been dissipated. It is to-day, and in all human probability will forever remain, beyond the power of the Turks to hold the Slav States of southeastern Europe in check in the event of a war between the Dual and the Triple Alliance. So long as they could effect that much Austria-Hungary was virtually relieved from apprehensions on her southern frontier and was in a position to move her armies when and where she chose. From the standpoint of the Teutonic Powers, therefore, the Turkish *débâcle* is equivalent to the removal of a prop on which they confidently expected to rely in the hour of need.

But it is also much more than that. Not only have the Turks been obliterated, but their place has been taken by vigorous Slav States whose policies are little likely to be attuned to the needs or wishes of either Vienna or Berlin. Not only, therefore, has the Triple Alliance lost a friend, but it has found a whole series of potential enemies. It is, of course, always hazardous to speak of nationalities in terms of races. The history of the Balkan peninsula has repeatedly shown that men are Bulgarians, Servians, Montenegrins, and so on, before they are Slavs, and that the sense of a common kinship, and even—in those regions a much more vital matter—of a common faith, does not prevent them from quarreling both with one another and with Russia. None the less it is palpable that the events of the past six months have resulted in a signal uplifting of the Slav race as a whole as well as of certain Slav peoples in particular. The prestige of Slavdom has been immensely enhanced, its power fortified, its aspirations and energies revived and strengthened beyond computation; and in all these items Deutschthum has undergone a corresponding eclipse. Russia has gained, Germany and Austria-Hungary have lost. And their loss is very much more than an intangible and sentimental loss of authority and repute. It is direct, menacing, material. Rightly or wrongly the world of European diplomacy has long looked upon Rumania, with its excellent army of over a quarter of a million, as virtually a fourth member of the Triple Alliance; and Rumania herself has persistently claimed to be regarded not as a Balkan State, but rather as the most easterly of the Powers of Europe. But in the new situation that has arisen with the rise of aggressive Slav States immediately beyond her southern frontier, it is clear that Rumania could only espouse the Teutons against the Slavs at the utmost peril to herself; and while, so long as King Charles lives and reigns, there is not likely to be any change in Rumania's policy of sagacious neutrality, and while the combinations of Balkan politics in the future are beyond prediction, the broad tendency of events appears decidedly to favor the idea that Rumania will drift away from the central European Powers and will throw in her lot with the enlarged Balkan States. At any rate, she can no longer be counted on with anything like the old confidence as an asset on the Teutonic side.

But, besides this, the emergence of a Greater Bulgaria, and especially of a Greater Serbia, flushed with victory, of tested military efficiency, and with unexpected resources to draw upon, necessarily throws out of gear the whole scheme of Austro-Hungarian strategy. Along her most vulnerable frontier the Dual Monarchy sees the erection of States whose peoples not only nourish an historic enmity against her, but are united by ties of the closest sympathy and kinship with many millions of her least loyal subjects. Even in times of peace every domestic difficulty with which the Germans and Magyars of Austria-Hungary have to contend in preserving their ascendancy over the Slav majority cannot but be greatly intensified by the magnetic neighborhood and intrigues of the new Slav States. But in time of war those difficulties would instantaneously react on the military situation. A conflict between the Triple Alliance and Russia might then prove a signal both for a rebellion of the Slav subjects in the Dual Monarchy and for an attack from without by the Slav Powers of the Balkans. Both these possibilities, of course, have existed before, but never in so formidable a degree as now. It was one of Moltke's dicta that owing to the interests which Austria-Hungary had to protect in the south and east she could not always act as an ally with the whole, but only with a part, of her full strength. But even Moltke did not foresee a time when the Balkan States, having crushed Turkey on the battle-field, would girdle the southern frontiers of the Dual Monarchy with a force at least seven hundred thousand and possibly over a million strong. Had he done so he would probably have admitted that such a development had reduced Austria-Hungary's effectiveness as an ally to not far from the vanishing-point and that the necessity of safeguarding her territory against the invasion of the southern Slavs had become so onerous as to leave her with little strength or thought for the major campaign against Russia. The struggle in the Balkans, therefore, has deprived the Teutonic Powers of the help that Turkey might, and almost certainly would, have rendered them; it has seriously weakened, it may before long prove to have severed, the ties of self-interest that for thirty years and more have bound Rumania to the Triple Alliance; it has registered the highest point of power and influence yet reached by Slavdom; and it has studded Austria-Hungary's flank with States whose concerted action

in the event of a war between the Great Powers would need pretty well all the attention that she could give it.

All these are developments exceedingly detrimental to German interests. Moreover, they have happened at a time when a variety of circumstances have combined to magnify their capacity for harm, and when, even without them, the statesmen of the Wilhelmstrasse and the Ballplatz might well have had grounds for uneasiness. Of these other factors the most disturbing is the extraordinary recovery of Russia since the disasters of the Far-Eastern war. The dying down of the revolutionary agitation, the steady progress in the work of internal reform, and the vastly improved condition of Russian commerce and finances, have been accompanied by a sweeping and effective military reorganization. In training, equipment, in material and personnel, and above all in initiative and confidence, the Russian army, which stands at a peace strength of some 1,500,000 men, is beyond comparison better prepared for war to-day than it was a decade or even half a decade ago. Communications, it is true, though much improved, are still comparatively backward, and the consignment disadvantage of a faulty distribution and of a tardy mobilization has not yet been overcome. But the Germans are as well aware of the improvement in the Russian forces as they are of the revival of the national spirit throughout the Czardom which preceded, and has been strongly reinforced by, the prestige accruing to the Russian name through the Slav victories in the Balkans; and from their point of view the rehabilitation of their eastern neighbor is all the more disquieting because the wire that in the shrewder Bismarckian days was never for long permitted to get out of order between St. Petersburg and Berlin was strained all but to breaking a few years ago when Germany sprang "in shining armor" to the side of her Austrian ally in order to prevent Russia's intervention on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not only, therefore, is Russia more powerful to-day than perhaps at any time in her history, but she is still smarting under the humiliation of 1909 and has resumed her old place in the councils of Europe, and something more than her old place in the affairs of the Balkans, in a spirit of anything but gratitude or friendliness to German policy.

Simultaneously with all this, Italy, never a very whole-hearted member of the Triplice, never quite at ease in the

forced company of Austria-Hungary, has become absorbed in the responsibilities she has contracted in Tripoli and finds herself in closer sympathy with Russia, France, and Great Britain than with her own allies. Nor when the Germans turn to the other, the western, quarter of the horizon is the sky much clearer. For France has undoubtedly in the past eighteen months been seized with a spirit of self-reliance and energy so different from her mood of 1905, when at Germany's bidding she sacrificed the ablest Foreign Minister that the Republic has yet produced, as to seem almost like an attack of Chauvinism. It is not really that, but unquestionably it indicates an attitude that would make any repetition of the manœuvres and pinpricks that Germany resorted to during the Morocco crisis an extremely hazardous venture. France does not meditate a swoop upon Germany for the recovery of the lost provinces, for revenge, or for any other purpose; but she has grown into a firm belief in herself and her army and she is in no mood to be browbeaten and dictated to. All round the circumference of her Continental interests Germany, in short, finds herself menaced as never before. She sees opening before her a disastrous prospect of the "inevitable" conflict between Teuton and Slav occurring under conditions more unfavorable to her chances of success than any that have obtained in the past forty years. The upheaval in the Balkans has placed her at a conscious disadvantage, and the grim possibility of a war on two fronts once more oppresses her. Always to some extent an imprisoned Empire, she now feels as though she were literally held in a vise. Her friends and allies have been robbed of much of their power to succor her and her enemies have suddenly multiplied in numbers, might, and daring. Not for a hundred years has Germany faced any such crisis, and the spirit in which she has risen to grapple with it gives us more than a little insight into the qualities of tenacity, providence, and self-sacrifice that enabled her to struggle from under, and finally to overthrow, the Napoleonic domination.

Such, then, are the chief causes of that prodigious increase of armaments which Germany regards—and no one, I think, will say unjustly or hastily regards—as indispensable to her security. She has met the dangers that threaten her by bringing forward the biggest Army Bill ever proposed in the history of Parliamentary Government. The

total increase in her military forces which has been decided upon consists of 4,000 officers, 15,000 non-commissioned officers, 117,000 corporals and private soldiers, and 27,000 horses. This means that about 163,000 new recruits are to be taken annually in order to increase the peace strength of the existing army and to create certain new units. I do not propose to go into the details of the new measure. It will be enough to say that it raises the total peace effective of the German army to over 800,000, that it brings the proportion of men serving with the colors to almost exactly the one per cent. provided by the Constitution, that it will enable the frontier regiments to be kept on practically a war-footing, and that it involves a non-recurring expenditure of some \$260,000,000 and a permanent annual increase in the army estimates of nearly \$50,000,000. Germany's military problem is precisely the opposite of that of France; it is a problem not of men, but of money; and while German opinion has frankly recognized the necessity of the immense additions demanded by the Government, yet the financial scheme for carrying them out has met with a good deal of criticism. What the Government proposes is to raise the whole of the non-recurring expenditure by a tax of one-half per cent. on the value of all property worth more than \$2,500, supplemented by a special levy on incomes of over \$12,500. These provisions demonstrate better than anything else the severity of the crisis which the German Government conceives itself to be facing. A single enforced tax on the capital of property, including the assets of all public companies, is not a device that any economist has ever been known to favor except in times of war or of great emergency when almost any expedient that does not defeat its own object is justifiable. It is without precedent in Germany in normal times; the only occasion on which it was resorted to being the patriotic uprising of Prussia against Napoleon a hundred years ago; and its adoption to-day emphasizes the growing disparity between the national resources and the national expenditure, overrides the arrangement which hitherto has relegated property taxes to the Federated States for their own revenue purposes, and proclaims, as some German papers have been quick to point out, the virtual bankruptcy of the national Treasury. When it is remembered that an issue of Prussian bonds at over four per cent. a few weeks ago was a complete failure, that the German money

market has for months been in a state of desperation, and that all German commerce is conducted on a credit basis, it will be seen that the required \$260,000,000 cannot be raised from individuals and corporations except by methods that will make a much larger inroad upon capital than even that enormous sum. Nor do the ways and means proposed for meeting the permanent annual increase of \$50,000,000 at all modify one's estimate of the critical character of the situation. What the Imperial Government suggests is that fresh contributions should be made by the Federated States in the form of property, income, and inheritance taxes; that the reduction of the sugar duty, which by legislation less than twelve months old was to take effect on or before October 1, 1916, shall be postponed by one year; and that the Imperial War Fund shall be increased by issuing \$30,000,000 in silver and the same amount in paper. These are all drastic provisions. They will be sanctioned by the Reichstag because all Germany perceives the need of a special effort in face of the new international perils that encompass her and because the whole country is in a glow of legitimate pride and enthusiasm over the celebration of the great deeds of a hundred years ago. But their character indicates a coming period of pressure and counter-pressure such as Europe, much as she has suffered under the burden of armaments, has never yet experienced.

The effect of the German move was instantly felt throughout Europe. Russia promptly added on three army corps, say, 100,000 men, to her military forces. Austria-Hungary made provision for an extra 75,000 men to her peace effective. France, as the country most directly menaced by German preparations, at once took the supreme step of reverting to the three years' system of compulsory service and of voting a special credit of \$100,000,000. For her the German challenge involved nothing less than the issue of life or death. With an army already considerably smaller than Germany's, with a population that has increased by barely ten per cent. while her rival's has increased by sixty-five per cent. in the past forty years, and inexorably condemned to face alone and at a moment's notice the first full shock of a German invasion, France had no option but to abandon the two years' service that she adopted in 1905. Only so could she make good her deficiency in numbers and confront the German hosts with a force not plainly inade-

quate to its responsibilities. Had the new German Army Bill come into force without any countervailing action on the part of France, the Republic would have found herself with nearly 350,000 fewer soldiers under arms than her principal antagonist. This ominous disparity could not be overcome by enlarging the area of enlistment, because France already drafts practically all her able-bodied men into the army and all exemptions and privileges were abolished by the law of 1905. It could only be overcome by a frank return to the three years' term of service. The French Ministry discussed all possible alternatives, but quickly, and by a process of exhaustion, reached the conclusion that this was the only feasible solution. The result of it will be to raise the French peace effective to some 700,000 (as against the German 800,000) and to place at the disposal of the Republic the largest possible number of the most efficiently trained troops—better trained, man for man, than the German forces. The only important exemption is a curtailment of from six months to a year in the service of youths in families of five or six children. Otherwise the new law applies indiscriminately to all physically sound Frenchmen and embraces retroactively the men who are now serving their two years with the colors. So stupendous a burden has never that I know of been shouldered by any nation in times of peace, and that it should be shouldered to-day by France, a democracy and a Republic, not only without any real opposition, but with alacrity and a great outburst of patriotic devotion, is surely one of the most remarkable phenomena of modern history.

The fact is that France for some years past has been undergoing a national and wholesome revival. The way in which she rebuilt her shattered fortunes after the war with Prussia, the ease and readiness with which she paid off the indemnity, the earnestness with which she remodeled her military forces, and the skill with which she safeguarded her international position were splendid but exhausting achievements. They left the nation drained. There was a time, and not so very long ago, when France seemed to dwell apart from realities in a soft and plausible dream-world, when national vigilance relaxed under the seemingly overwhelming guarantees of the Dual Alliance, when faction and corruption got the upper hand, and when a profound lassitude and pessimism had penetrated the popular

mind. But always and before it was too late there has come the awakening. One might have thought, for instance, that after the Panama scandals the soul of France was dormant, if not dying. The national decadence seemed to be accepted as a clear if curious fact, just worth the trouble of analyzing and of tracing back to this cause and to that. The smiling genius of the land had passed, it appeared, into a total eclipse of hopelessness. It was a time when France, from sheer *ennui*, might have welcomed a Pretender. There came, instead, the Dreyfus case, probing and stirring the most heedless conscience, hurling men against naked realities, shattering parties, raising everywhere the extremes of fratricidal strife, but energizing the national character with a new will and steadfastness and evoking the display of the most heroic as well as of the basest qualities. The Dreyfus affair brought to a sudden head almost all the ills from which the country suffered. Thanks to its rough and radical surgery, she was able, after a supreme struggle, to throw them off. The ordeal wrought many changes in internal politics and external relations, but the greatest change of all was in the moral tone and conscience of France. It has not been by any easy road, and not without momentary panics and stumblings, that France has reached her present position of assured and confident strength. M. Waldeck-Rousseau did much for her; M. Clémenceau's Premiership did even more; it stiffened the national backbone, put heart into the Republic, and stopped the dry-rot that threatened to eat into the services; but perhaps the greatest instrument of French regeneration has been Germany and her policy in the Morocco question and the undisguised pressure she put forward to compel France to drop the *entente* with Great Britain. France submitted for a time, but when the provocation was repeated her nerves steadied themselves, she perceived that she must either cease to exist as an independent Power of the first rank or assert her freedom of action in unmistakable form, and throughout the Agadir crisis she faced and did not flinch from the imminent possibility of war.

From that moment France has never looked back. M. Poincaré's accession to office as Prime Minister in January of last year, and his more recent election to the Presidency, have quickened the national sense of a regained authority and power. There is now a more robust and realistic temper

and mode of life in France than at any moment in the past four decades. Is it also a more Chauvinistic temper? I do not think it is. There is nothing provocative about it; and if Germany were to abandon her new Army Bill France would thankfully respond by an indefinite postponement of a return to the three years' service. It is true that one hears in Paris to-day a good deal more talk than there used to be about the chances of recovering the lost provinces, that the martial spirit is more in evidence, and that there are two plays running at the Paris theaters with war and Alsace-Lorraine and patriotism as their motive. But it is perfectly safe to say that outside the ranks of the inveterate Jingoos nobody in France desires war. Nobody, on the other hand, desires any repetition of the unpreparedness and the consequent humiliation when Germany pounced upon France in 1905. The national feeling is against aggression and adventure; but it is equally against a tame submission to a challenge or an insult. France demands of her Executive sufficient firmness to forestall or ward off the sort of treatment she has received, and been forced to submit to, from the hands of Germany more than once in the past few years. She has no thought of brusquely asserting herself in European affairs. But she is confident of her strength, she is self-reliant without bravado, and any attempt to hector or intimidate her would be promptly resented and repelled.

I do not myself believe that Germany meditates any such attempt. She is sufficiently cognizant of the changed situation to be aware that weapons which it was dangerous to use even five or eight years ago it would be sheer madness to employ to-day—unless, of course, which is scarcely credible, she deliberately intends to provoke Armageddon. What, then, is the net result of the pace she has set in the competition of armaments? Relatively the result is nil. The instantaneous counter-strokes of France and Russia leave Germany, so far as her two chief antagonists are concerned, precisely as she was. But her action has produced or seems likely to produce other and less negative consequences. Absorbed once more in her military problem, it is probable that she will be obliged to slacken off in her naval rivalry with Great Britain. Whether that will relieve the United Kingdom from participating in the gigantic increase of military armaments to which all Europe is now committed is a question that threatens to precipitate a sharp contro-

versy among British statesmen and publicists; and, indeed, the whole position of Great Britain, an island State, safeguarded by an apparently invincible navy, no longer capable of playing any very effective part in a Continental land war, but at the same time bound both to France and to Russia by somewhat indefinite ties of mutual interest and keenly apprehensive of all that a German victory over either Power would mean for herself, is one of singular and arresting anomalies. Meanwhile the piling up of armaments on this colossal and unprecedented scale fills all minds with a tense foreboding that they may prove as much an incentive to war as a preventive of it. Well over \$1,500,000,000 is now being spent by the leading nations of Europe on preparations to wage war or avert it; and peace itself is in danger of becoming a luxury too expensive to be borne. That is an amazing commentary on the madness of the world in which we live, on the persistence of force in the midst of what we are pleased to call our civilization, and on the inexorable influence over the minds and actions of mankind which is still exercised by the idea of nationality. Americans, I imagine, viewing the spectacle which Europe presents to-day, would hardly for one moment be tempted to exchange their happy and remote security for the imminent contentions, the charged and sullen atmosphere, and the intolerable and wasteful burdens that oppress the older world.

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